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 THE BLACK MARE

Tshes bcu lha mo མེས་བུ་ལྷ་མོ།

Grandfather (Blo bzang nor bu, 1943) teaches, "Livestock lack the ability to speak but, other than that, they are just like us." This is one reason my brother (Blo bzang, 1992) and I have treated our livestock very kindly since we were children. Another reason comes from observing Grandfather and his compassion for livestock.

One summer (1995) when I was about seven years old, Father (Bsam 'grub, 1967) bought a black pregnant mare from our neighbor. The mare was not young, but it was a good deal, and Father knew that Grandfather would be glad.

The minute Father got home with the mare, Grandfather was so happy that he did not know what to do. He soon began grooming the mare, and wove a colorful necklace out of yarn and tied a handful of amulets to it to protect the mare and its baby. He combed her long tail, braided the hair into a single braid, and tied the end with a long red silk strip. He braided the mane into small sections and tied them with pink silk strips. Finally, he brushed her entire body and then her forelock.

While Grandfather was grooming the mare, he talked to her as though she was a human being.

Normally, villagers took turns looking after all the village's livestock from spring to fall until everyone was done with harvesting, but Grandfather insisted on herding the black mare separately. My parents did not have the time to look after the mare separately so Grandfather had to get up very early no matter if it was raining or sunny. Then he took the mare to graze in the mountains for the entire day.

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Mother (Ye shes, 1967) brought breakfast to Grandfather's bedroom every morning and treated him like a king, but he gave up all that and got up at the same time as Mother to care for the mare.

Grandfather fed dried peas to the mare in the morning and afternoon every day, and sometimes he made a special black tea soup for her to drink. Grandfather's life that summer was full of caring for the mare.

My parents were concerned that Grandfather was too tired, but he felt that he had to do his best for the pregnant mare. Grandfather walked on his way to the mountains. He never rode the mare. Sometimes, I went with Grandfather, but I soon felt bored and returned to the village to play with other children, but he seemed to enjoy his time there.

The black mare gave birth to a female foal after a few months. Grandfather was proud and happy that both the mare and the foal were healthy. Afterwards, Grandfather still got up early to herd the mare and its foal separately until the foal was one-month-old.

Sometimes, Grandfather would leave home to attend religious events. The minute he returned home, he would check on the mare and the foal and ask Brother and me if we had followed his instructions to take care of them.

Seven years passed and the black mare was old and slow, and could not keep up with the other horses as they went to the herding pasture. Grandfather then again got up early in the morning and took the mare alone to the mountains and brought her back late in the evening.

The black mare was so well treated that she looked very strong.

Grandfather said, "I'm lucky to have a loving family that takes good care of me, and the black mare is lucky that she has me to care for her."

One snowy winter day, we kept the livestock home and fed them with barley straw. At noon, Mother released all the livestock and drove them to the river. On the way, a neighbor was coming back

from the river where she had watered her livestock. One of her yaks gored the black mare's belly. It was a deep puncture. Father and some neighbors managed to bring the black mare back home, where it died a couple of days later.

We all felt bad. Grandfather would not eat for days. He made butter lamps and lit them in our family shrine room, and chanted scriptures for the horse. Though the black mare was just a horse, it was far more than that for Grandfather.

#### NON-ENGLISH TERMS

blo bzang ལྷོ་བཟང་།  
 blo bzang nor bu ལྷོ་བཟང་འོར་བུ།  
 bsam 'grub བསམ་རྒྱུབ།  
 tshes bcu lha mo ཚེས་བརྒྱ་ལྷ་མོ།  
 ye shes ཡེ་ཤེས།